I. INTRODUCTION

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Inspection of the application of United Nations recruitment, placement and promotion policies" was prepared by Inspectors F. Bouayad-Agha and H. Hernandez, at the Inspectors' initiative.

2. The Secretary-General welcomes this initiative. The recognition on the part of the Inspectors that the Secretary-General has set in motion a new human resources management team, strategy and approach is welcomed. As the Inspectors have rightly noted, in both the body of their report and in their specific recommendations, the Secretary-General's strategy for the management of the human resources of the Organization, set out in document A/C.5/49/5, analyses the inadequacy of the current policies and systems and proposes a comprehensive strategy and programme to address them. This strategy was endorsed by the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session in its resolution 49/222. A number of the elements of the strategy focusing on the critical areas of recruitment, placement and promotion coincide fully with the Inspectors' views in such areas as the importance of planning and policy coordination; vacancy management; work planning and performance appraisal management; job design and classification and their link to successfully recruiting and managing staff; decentralization and delegation of authority with a corresponding system to ensure accountability and responsibility (including in the management of human resources); and, above all, the need to create a management (as opposed to procedural, administrative) environment and culture within the Organization "that is supportive of having staff members contribute to their maximum potential, effectiveness and efficiency".

3. The human resources management strategy also shares fully the Inspectors' specific views on the need to enhance such recruitment systems and tools of communication with substantive departments, recruitment planning and vacancy management, roster development and management, proactive advertising (including through electronic means), the internship programme, campus recruitment campaigns, structured panel interviews, renewed cooperation with Member States and professional institutions to identify qualified men and women candidates and streamlined recruitment procedures. The support extended by the General Assembly, in terms of both its endorsement of the strategy and the provision of additional limited budgetary resources to develop a planning and policy coordination capacity within the Office of Human Resources Management represents a modest step forward towards addressing the legitimate concerns expressed by the Inspectors.

4. The Secretary-General regrets, however, that the Inspectors apparently overlooked the impact of the United Nations uncompetitive compensation package as it relates to recruiting and retaining staff. By so doing, the Inspectors missed a significant problem in the Organization's difficulty to attract and retain the very best professionals to its various programmes. More proactive recruitment for quality professionals as correctly advocated by the Inspectors requires that the United Nations be competitive in the international professional marketplace, regardless of the nationality, or often place of recruitment, of the candidate in question. The present salary package falls

short in respect of such persons who have other options for employment whether, for example, in Japan, South East Asia, Europe or North America.

5. There are a number of areas covered in the report that reflect misunderstandings and require clarification or commentary.

II. COMMENTS ON GENERAL FINDINGS

Paragraph 75

6. It is recognized that recruitment at the P-3 level through the competitive examination process has been rather slow, in that such recruitment has had to be balanced - in effect, has had to compete - with recruitment through regular recruitment channels that are still prevalent at the P-3 level. In 1995, to the extent possible, a more systematic approach to the use of competitive examinations will be adopted for appointment at the P-3 level. A system more responsive to Member States and programme managers is being sought.

Paragraph 77

7. It is not clear how the Inspectors reached the cost estimates for recruitment at the P-3 level, since such examinations are conducted within the overall budget for competitive examinations at the P-2 level. It should be noted that recruitment through the competitive examination process represents a long-term investment for the Organization, which can be "amortized" over the career of those recruited. However, cost effectiveness studies will be initiated this year.

Paragraphs 78 and 79

8. The assertion that the general level of candidates is rather low is not borne out by their success in the Secretariat. Previous studies have shown that their rate of advancement is faster than that of other recruits (A/C.5/40/39, paras. 11-16, and A/49/445, paras. 41-44). However, this perception indicates a lack of programme managers' involvement in the recruitment process.

Paragraph 80

9. The Office of Human Resources Management agrees with the views of the Inspectors on the use of probationary appointments on initial appointment and has taken appropriate measures to discontinue the practice, pending a change in the appropriate staff rule.

Paragraphs 81 and 82

10. It should be recalled that the competitive examination process was established by the General Assembly to identify the best candidates in each Member State. Such considerations notwithstanding, in order to be recommended for recruitment, every candidate must meet a high standard of performance as demonstrated through written and oral examinations and interviews. Interviews are indeed designed to assess personal attitudes and communication skills of the

candidates; professional knowledge and skills are tested in the written and oral examinations. However, the balance between examinations and interviews needs careful reconsideration.

Paragraph 85, last sentence

11. While it is recognized that programme managers may have, on occasion, a leading candidate in mind, the system encourages competition. Drawing on candidates proposed by programme managers is not in itself a bad practice, providing that gender and geographical representation are respected.

Paragraph 99

12. It is recognized that larger fields of candidates need to be identified to fill vacancies and it is anticipated that improvements in this regard will be attained through an enhanced planning capacity and the implementation of the human resources strategy (A/C.5/49/5) elements pertaining to recruitment. It is however inaccurate to state that "the general practice" has been "to identify posts available for candidates known in advance".

Paragraphs 100-103

13. Contrary to what is stated in these paragraphs, the United Nations does have standards for the recruitment of staff at various levels in the Professional category and above. These were provisionally revised in November 1994 to take into account the changing market situation and efforts to improve the representation of women in the Secretariat as well as the need for managerial experience at senior levels. It should be noted that candidates recruited to Professional posts at the P-3 level and above meet high standards of qualifications: they have advanced university degrees in their field of work and relevant professional experience commensurate with the level of the post concerned. However, work needs to be done as proposed by the Inspectors.

Paragraphs 107 and 108

14. These issues should be facilitated once the Integrated Management Information Systems (IMIS) is fully operational and when training in roster management is undertaken.

Paragraphs 110 and 114

15. Duly completed and classified job descriptions exist for all posts up to the D-1 level. A brief description of those functions, derived from the job description, is incorporated into circulated vacancy announcements. The Office of Human Resources Management also reviews on an advisory basis job descriptions for posts at the D-2 level. Moreover, statements of work assignments and responsibilities of all staff developed through the system of accountability and responsibility and the performance appraisal system will provide guidance in the future. All candidatures are reviewed against these job descriptions by the Office of Human Resources Management and the appointment and promotion bodies. Some generic job descriptions have already been developed and efforts in this area will continue. The modest resources of the Office of Human Resources

Management do not facilitate the updating classification/job description exercise.

Paragraph 115

16. The recently revised recruitment standards referred to in the context of paragraphs 101 and 103 also take into account market conditions, although more work must be done.

Paragraphs 116-120

17. As indicated in the Secretary-General's strategy for the management of the human resources of the Organization, the views of the Inspectors with regard to the importance of planning for human resources management cannot be too strongly emphasized. The establishment of such capacity within the Office of Human Resources Management over the course of 1995 is expected to go far in addressing the concerns and deficiencies that currently prevail. It should also be noted that the new Performance Appraisal System will introduce performance indicators that measure the managerial skills of programme managers, including their efforts to improve the status of women in the Secretariat. Moreover, the Office of Human Resources Management will be conducting management skills training programmes aimed at enhancing precisely the type of managerial skills that will not only help in the process of recruiting staff of the "highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity" but also create a management culture and environment that enables them to contribute to their full potential to the work of the Organization.

III. COMMENTS ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS

18. As indicated above, the Secretary-General's strategy for the management of the human resources of the Organization is very much in line with the Inspectors' recommendations. They will be fully taken into account in the implementation by the Office of Human Resources Management of the Secretary-General's strategy.

Recommendation 1

19. The Secretary-General has just published the second edition of the Personnel Administrators Handbook, which, although not precisely the type of manual indicated by the Inspectors, to a large degree serves the anticipated purpose. In addition, as a matter of course, personnel policies and practices are being reviewed with a view to rationalizing them and making them more transparent. However, a human resources management manual is greatly needed. The Inspectors' proposals in the second part of the recommendation are in keeping with the Secretary-General's strategy.

Recommendations 2 and 3

20. The Inspectors' points are well taken and, to the extent feasible, will be applied.

Recommendation 4

21. The Staff-Management Coordination Committee is tentatively reviewing the desirability of proposing the extension of the retirement age of staff up to the age of 62.

Recommendations 5 and 6

22. The comments made under paragraph 77 apply. Competitive examinations have been the subject of several studies and analyses by both the Secretariat and Member States. The list of studies already conducted includes the following:

1.	Report by two consultants to the Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel (analysis of G to P and national recruitment examinations)	July 1984
2.	Report of the Secretary-General to the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/40/39)	November 1985
3.	Report of the JIU (A/39/483)	September 1984
4.	Report of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC/21/R.21)	February 1985
5.	Report of the Group of High-Level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations (Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 49 (A/41/49))	1986
6.	Report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly (A/49/445)	September 1994

None the less, the Secretary-General will report to the General Assembly on the conduct of recruitment activities as well as the use of national competitive examinations, including the P-3 level, in the context of normal reporting procedures. It should also be noted that the examinations have wide support from Member States.

Recommendation 7

23. The first part of this recommendation is fully in line with the Secretary-General's strategy for the management of the human resources of the Organization. As regards competitive exams, the prevailing view in the Secretariat is that completive exams bring well qualified candidates to the Organization. Previous studies have shown that their rate of advancement is faster than that of other recruits. Comments on paragraphs 78 and 79 of the report refer.

Recommendation 8

24. The Secretariat fully agrees with this recommendation and has already taken measures to implement it.

Recommendation 9

25. The Inspectors' suggestions regarding the format and content of rosters are appreciated and will be used when improving the existing inadequacies.

IV. CONCLUSION

26. The Secretary-General wishes to express his appreciation for the Inspectors' research and efforts leading to their thought-provoking observations and recommendations. In taking action on many of the recommendations, the Office of Human Resources Management looks forward to working closely with JIU and Member States.